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THE
HOLY CARPET
OF THE
MOSQUE AT ARDEBIL.

"I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold,
"My head has no protection other than this porchway,
"The work of the slave of this Holy Place,
"Maksoud of Kashan,
"in the year 942."

EDWARD STEBBING.

Copy No. Forty nine

Issue limited to Fifty Copies

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Freer Gallery of Art



LONDON :
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1893.
[Issued by Private Subscription.]

THIS BOOK OF ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THE
HOLY CARPET OF THE MOSQUE AT ARDEBIL

IS DEDICATED TO

JOHN EDWARD TAYLOR, ESQ.,

WHOSE LOVE OF THE BEAUTIFUL IN PERSIAN ART HAS

LED HIM TO AID, IN THE MOST GENEROUS

MANNER, IN SECURING IT FOR

THE NATION.

E. S.

P R E F A C E.

THE Great Carpet from the Mosque of Ardebil, the subject of the present work, and now the property of the Nation, was first exhibited in England, with other fine examples, for two months in the spring of 1892, by Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Company, Limited, of 34, Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square, London.

In the first edition of "The Holy Carpet of the Mosque at Ardebil," written by me for the occasion referred to, the intention was expressed of reproducing in colours, at an early opportunity, this splendid specimen from the old looms of Persia.

So fine an example of hand-work seemed to demand exceptional treatment. I decided, therefore, that as far as possible all mechanical processes should be avoided in the reproduction of this and the two other carpets selected for illustration. With this object in view careful outline tracings were made direct from the carpets by Mr. Davies, a member of the staff of Vincent Robinson and Company, who exhibited great skill and patience in their preparation. These tracings were subsequently reduced by the process of photo-lithography, and printed by the well-known firm of Messrs. Whiteman and Bass.

The plates so prepared have been coloured by hand, direct from the carpets, by my son Henry and my daughter Rose Enid Stebbing.

Although the present edition is limited to fifty copies, still the work of producing 250 hand-coloured plates is not a light one, and the object of the artists has been confined, at my instance, to producing faithful representations of the carpets without attempting too high a finish at a cost of time that would have unduly delayed the completion of the work.

EDWARD STEBBING.

42, Gower Street,

London, W.C.,

12th March, 1893.

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The Holy Carpet

of the

Mosque at Ardebil.



In the early part of December, 1891, I was asked, at short notice, to read a paper on Persian Carpets before a meeting of the Art Workers' Guild at their Hall in Barnard's Inn.

Subsequently, I was requested to publish this paper, as likely to prove of interest to others besides the appreciative audience gathered at the meeting; but the difficulty presented itself as to the possibility of awaking interest in remarks that mainly depended on the unique and interesting carpets lent to serve as illustrations.

However, a carpet from the Mosque at Ardebil, of extraordinary and exceptional value, having come into the hands of Vincent Robinson and Co., Limited, of 34 Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square, it was thought that a wider circle should be invited to inspect this and the other specimens referred to, before their inevitable dispersal in the ordinary course of trade.

With this view Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Co. decided to set apart their large gallery for a short time for the purpose of properly exhibiting these unique specimens, and, for their better illustration, to publish the paper referred to. Such a step appeared to be the more advisable, in the interest of amateurs of these remarkable productions, as they rarely remain together for long, as a series or collection, in any one warehouse.

Of the specimens illustrated in the well-known work, "Eastern Carpets, Twelve Early Examples," published in 1882, eight were at the time of publication the property of the Company; but three of these have since gone to America, two to other countries, two are in private collections, and only one remains in their hands.

In the following paper reference has been made to the probable dates and places of manufacture of certain of the remarkable carpets that from time to time have found their way into this and other collections. Hitherto, much has been left to conjecture, but the splendid specimen from the Ardebil Mosque serves to clear up many doubts and speculations.

The dimensions of this carpet are 34 ft. 6 in. x 17 ft. 6 in. The ground of the body of the fabric is of a rich blue, covered with a floral tracery of exquisite delicacy and freedom of treatment. A centre medallion of pale yellow terminates on its outer edge in sixteen minaret-shaped points, from which spring sixteen cartouches, four green, four red, and eight cream, and from two of these again are, as it were,

The Year 942 A.H.

suspended and hanging in the direction of the respective ends of the carpet, two of the sacred lamps of the Mosque.

But a crowning point of interest lies in the pale cream cartouche placed within the border at the top end of the carpet, bearing its inwoven inscription in bold black characters, of which the translation reads as follows:—

“ I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold,

“ My head has no protection other than this porchway,

“ The work of the slave of this Holy Place,

“ Maksoud of Kashan,

“ in the year 942.”

Quarter sections of the central medallion, also on a pale yellow ground relieved by tracery, form the angles, while a broad border completes the glorious design—a border of alternate elongated and rounded cartouches, filled with floral and other tracery, the former on a base of red, and the latter on green or shaded yellow; the whole surrounded by an exquisite tracery on a rich brown ground, flanked on the inner side by a broad band of cream, seven inches wide, relieved by a variation of the so-called cloud pattern, and a narrower inner band of crimson next the body of the carpet, and on the outer side by a single broad band, also seven inches wide, of tawny brown shading from dark to light, and relieved by a bold design in blue.

As already remarked, it is in the date of this carpet that the chief interest from many points of view may be said to lie; a brief reference, therefore, to the history of Persia at the time of its manufacture may not be without advantage.

After a period of prolonged trouble, the advent of the Suffavean Dynasty, in the person of Shah Ismail, brought with it comparative tranquillity and a consequent revival of the arts.

Shah Ismail, as we are told in a well-known history, traced his descent from Moosah, the seventh Imaum. “ Almost all of his ancestors were regarded as holy men, and some of them as saints. They had long been settled at Ardebil, where they lived as retired devotees, that they might attract disciples and obtain that fame which they pretended to despise.”

His father, Hyder, had married a sister of the famous Uzun Hussun who died Shah of Persia, A.H. 883. Hyder himself was slain at Shirwan, in an expedition he had undertaken to avenge his father's death. His remains, regarded as those of a martyr, were interred at Ardebil; he was canonised, and his tomb became a place of devotion to his followers.

During these events Ismail was a child, but at the age of fourteen he placed himself at the head of his adherents, and by the year of the Hegira 908, or A.D. 1502, he became the acknowledged ruler of Persia. His death, in the year 930 A.H., or A.D. 1523, took place at Ardebil, where he had gone on a pilgrimage to the tomb of his father. The Persians, says the historian, dwell with rapture on the character of Ismail, whom they deem not only the founder of a great dynasty, but the person

Anthony Jenkinson.

to whom that faith in which they glory owes its establishment as a national religion. He is styled in their histories King of the Shiahs, an appellation which marks the affection with which his memory is regarded.

Ismail was succeeded by his son Tamasp, then a boy of ten years. It was to this latter monarch that Queen Elizabeth sent a mission, which was, however, ill received, and we are told that the bearer of the Queen's letter, Anthony Jenkinson, was much offended at a pair of slippers being sent him lest his Christian feet should pollute the sacred carpet of the holy monarch. This being a common Oriental custom, probably no insult was intended, but the envoy may have not unnaturally felt annoyance, on his retiring from the audience, at a servant being ordered to follow him for the purpose of obliterating his footprints with sand.

From this short historical retrospect and the inscription itself, we learn that this wonderful carpet dates from the 12th year of the reign of Tamasp, A.H. 942, or 1535 of our era; and that it was especially made for the Mosque of Ardebil there can be little reason to doubt—Ardebil, the Holy City, where the tomb of the martyr Hyder, grandfather of the reigning monarch, was drawing all the devotees of Persia

The fact that it was designed for such a destination, and woven during a period of exceptional tranquillity, would of itself be sufficient evidence that it was intended to equal or surpass all previous efforts. Fortunately, the carpet is in existence; and, in a marvellous state of preservation, after the lapse of nearly four centuries, with its colours fresh as when first from the loom, leaves no room for conjecture.

E. S.

29th April, 1892.

PLATE I.

THE HOLY CARPET OF THE MOSQUE AT ARDEBIL.

PLATE I.

THE HOLY CARPET OF THE MOSQUE AT ARDEBIL.

Dimensions, 34 ft. 6 in. x 17 ft. 6 in. Design: a floral tracery on a shaded ground of deep blue, relieved by a bold central medallion of pale yellow, in which the cloud design in light blue is shown in various forms, while the immediate centre is filled by a smaller medallion, also on a light blue ground. From the outer edge of the large medallion spring sixteen cartouches of varied colouring, and from two of these, again, in the direction of the ends of the carpet, hang two of the sacred mosque lamps. Quarter sections of the central medallion form the angles. On a separate cartouche at the top of the carpet, within the border, is the following inscription in bold black characters, on a cream ground:—

“ I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold,
“ My head has no protection other than this porchway,
“ The work of the slave of this Holy Place,
“ Maksoud of Kashan,
“ in the year 942.”

Border: a very delicate floral tracery on a rich ground of brown, relieved by a series of alternate elongated and rounded cartouches, filled with floral and other tracery, the former on a red, the latter on a green or yellow ground. On the inner side of this border a bold band of cream, seven inches wide, exhibiting a formal treatment of the cloud pattern in red, and a narrow band of crimson, separate it from the centre of the carpet, while a similar band seven inches wide, of tawny brown, varying from light to dark, and relieved by a bold scroll work in light blue, frames in the whole design.

Hand-tied knots to the square inch, 380, or 33,000,000 for the whole fabric.

Place of origin: Ardebil or Kashan.

Date: A.D. 1535.

A full account of this carpet is given on pages 5-7, but as the following extract from Curzon's "Persia" confirms the view taken of the importance attaching to Ardebil and its Mosque at the time when the carpet was woven, it may not be without interest to quote it:—

“Ardebil was elevated into the first rank of Persian cities as the residence and last resting place of the famous saint Sheikh Sefi-ed-Din, the direct descendant of the seventh Imaum and contemporary of Timour. In the fifth generation from him came Shah Ismail, the founder of the Sefair dynasty, who first established his power and was finally interred as sovereign of all Persia in Ardebil. No wonder that two sepulchres so holy should, throughout the duration of the Sefair dynasty, have attracted to Ardebil a host of pilgrims and have conferred upon it the distinction almost of a royal city.

“In a decayed and crumbling Mosque the tomb may yet be seen. In the main hall of the same building, behind silver gratings and a golden plated gate, is the tomb of the Sheikh overlaid with costly carpets and shawls. An adjoining hall contains a superb collection of old faience, principally china vases, the offering of Shah Abbas.”



PLATE II.

THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE CARPET.
THE CENTRE MEDALLION AND THE TWO LAMPS.

Drawn to one-fifth scale.

PLATE II.

THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE CARPET.

THE CENTRE MEDALLION AND THE TWO LAMPS.

Scale, one-fifth.

Of the many interesting details of the design of the centre piece the varied treatment of the "cloud" is most noticeable. In four instances the figure is given in its normal development. I refer to the four that encircle the small central medallion on a pale blue ground. Four more, bearing on the circumference, are equally regular in form, but these are bound in the centre by a graceful band or knot, while the intervening spaces are filled by eight others of the conventional type commonly found in the decoration of Chinese vases. It is interesting to note that the special treatment of this figure, in the second series referred to, is that adopted for the decoration of the centre member of the border of the small contemporary carpet, also from the Mosque of Ardebil, illustrated on Plate IV.

The bold scroll decoration in greenish blue, edged with red, is very effective, and gives a marked character both to the centre and angle medallions. Persian designers appear to have introduced it freely where breadth of treatment was required, as may be seen in an example at the South Kensington Museum, labelled "A painted copy, size of the original, portion of wall tile decoration at Ispahan."

The two Mosque lamps, introduced into the design with consummate skill, point clearly to the sacred purpose for which the carpet was intended. The delicacy of treatment in their decoration is astonishing, and one may almost imagine that specimens of the famous enamelled glass itself are before one.

Marvellous as is the accuracy displayed by the weavers in working out the details of the design of this wonderful carpet, still there are not wanting traces of the irregularity often found in Oriental art.

The lamp figured on the right of the Plate is a good example. This was the first lamp introduced, and although the want of symmetry clearly seen in the drawing, against the plain background, is by no means so apparent in the carpet itself, still it had not escaped the notice of the master weaver, nor was the irregularity forgotten. Years must have elapsed before the second lamp had to be woven, but then Maksoud of Kashan surpassed himself and produced the perfect specimen shown on the Plate at the left of the centre medallion.

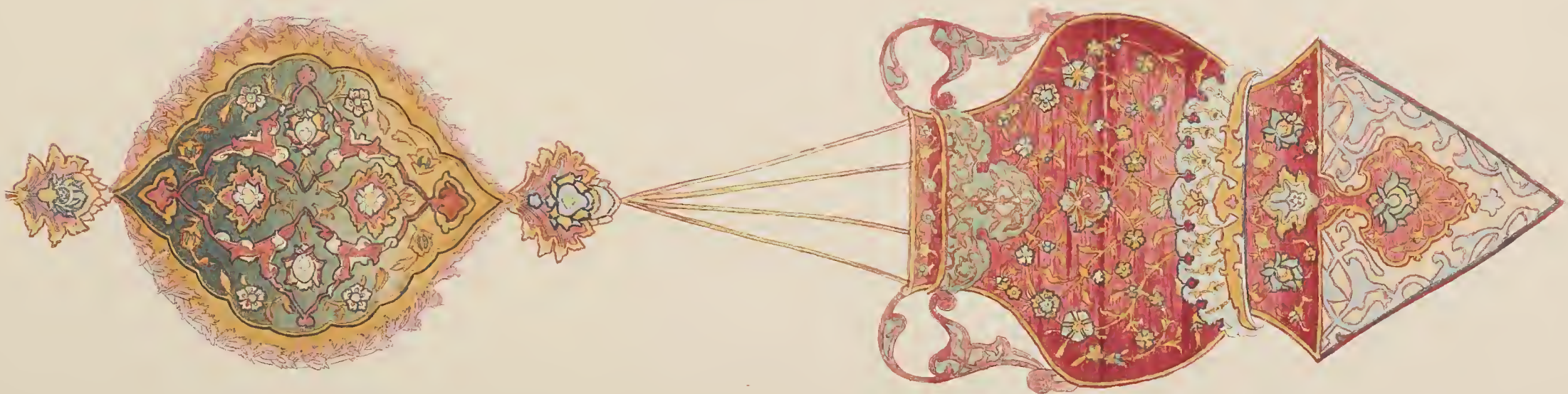
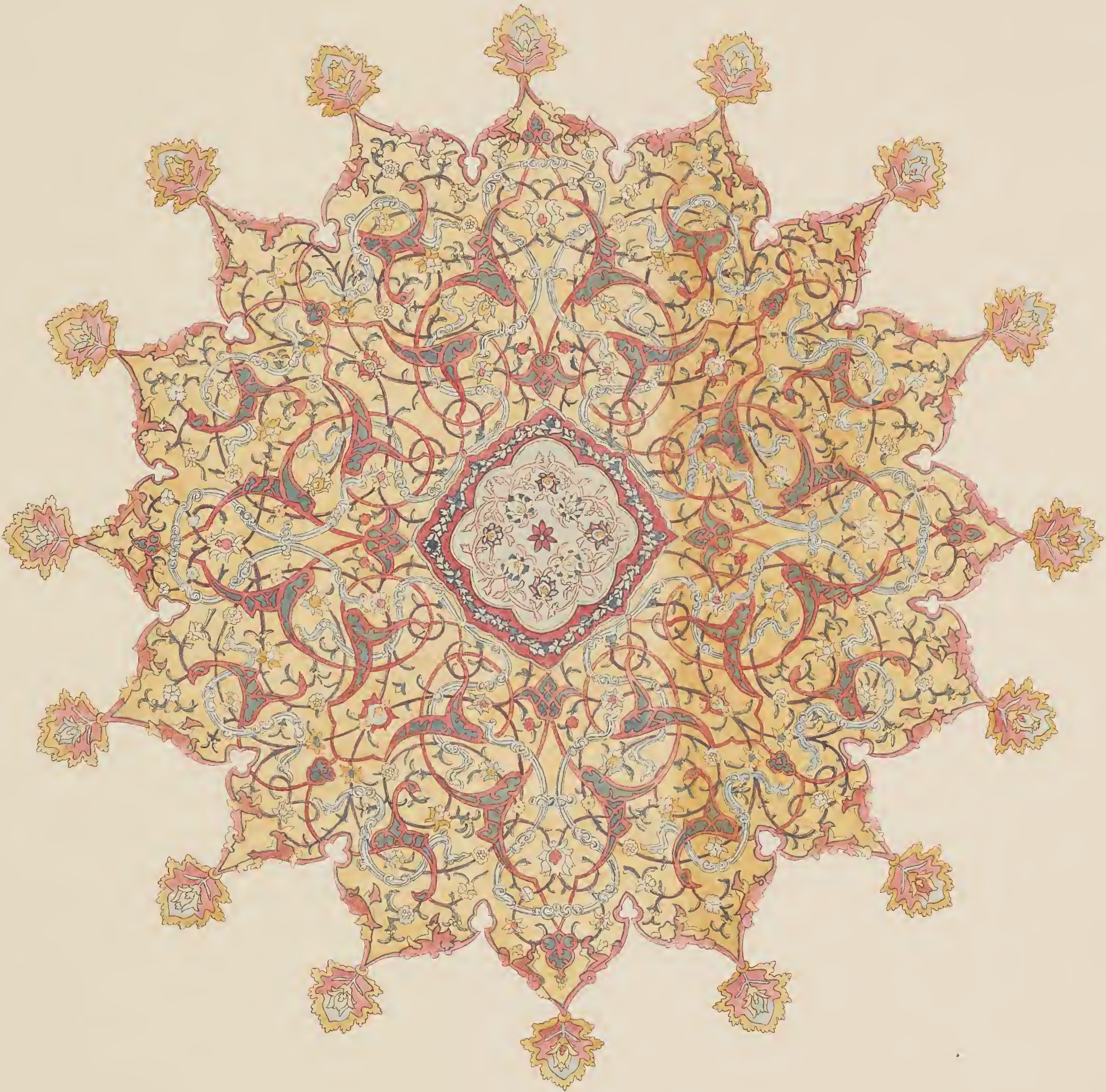
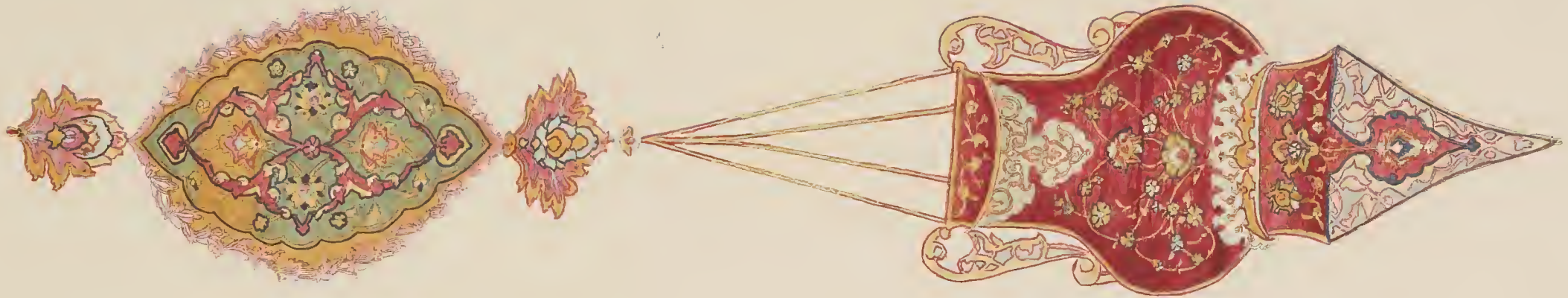


PLATE III.

CORNER OF THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE CARPET.

SHOWING THE INSCRIPTION AND DATE.

Drawn to one-sixth scale.

PLATE III.

THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE CARPET.

Corner Section and Inscription.

The scale of the drawing given on this Plate is one-sixth.

The general details of the whole design, with the exception of the lamps, are here represented with an accuracy that recalls the very feeling of the carpet itself. The outer member of the border, apart from the boldness and freedom of treatment displayed in the execution, is especially interesting. I have given on Plate VII., figure 9, a section of this border, while figure 10 gives the motive of the design. Figure 11 on the same Plate is a section of the inner member of the small contemporary carpet, the subject of Plate IV., while figure 11 U.B. shows the separate details of this inner member. Dissimilar as is the general effect, the design is the same. It must be remembered that both these carpets date from nearly four hundred years ago. Figure 8 of the same Plate is taken from the border of a carpet about one hundred years old, and is again the same design, as an examination of figure 8 A.A. will show. Finally, figure 12, although taken from a carpet border of some sixty years ago, is the prominent feature of most carpets of the Herati design still woven at the present time. The identity of figure 12 of to-day with figure 10 of four hundred years ago is most interesting, and it may not be out of place here to point out that the general outline of this recurring form bears a striking analogy to the skeleton bull's head introduced freely in classical architecture as the ornament of the Metope.

The decoration of the angle is practically the same as that of the centre medallion, but it will be noticed that the cloud forms are dispensed with.

The inscription cartouche is introduced with great skill, and is in itself an ornament. It is well known that calligraphy was an art highly esteemed by the Persians, one that even princes and rulers have been proud to excel in, having first adopted it in compliance with the Mahomedan law which requires every man to be acquainted with some art, or means of earning a livelihood, in case of need. Dr. Wills, indeed, states "that a single line by a great calligrapher was worth a fabulous amount, and that large sums were often paid for a good manuscript of Hafiz or the Koran," but he adds "that printing has destroyed all this, and that calligraphy as a high art is dying the death."

The changing shades freely introduced, both in the dark blue ground and in the various decorative details of this masterpiece of weaving, call for a few remarks.

It is well known that the Eastern weaver dyes his wool from day to day—uses now white wool, now brown or tawny, as the case may be; and from this carelessness or necessity it is frequently argued that the changes and shadings so much admired are accidents for which the weavers are not responsible, and that consequently they are not to be credited with the beautiful effects so created. Such is the contention; but this, at all events, is certain—that the Ardebil carpet owes its power of radiating light to these changes and shadings; and if, in their production, Maksoud of Kashan showed either carelessness or ignorance, he was probably content to feel that he shared them in common with the setting sun when he robes the sky with rainbow hues.



کاروانی و کاغذی کاروانی
مهر آستان و مهر آستان
مهر آستان و مهر آستان

PLATE IV.

SMALL CARPET FROM THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE.

XVITH CENTURY.

PLATE IV.

SMALL CARPET FROM THE ARDEBIL MOSQUE.

XVIII CENTURY.

Dimensions : 10 ft. 7 in. x 5 ft. 10 in. A floral tracery of soft colouring on a deep red ground forms the body of the carpet, a large number of the flowers being worked with great delicacy, as it were in relief, on a base of silk-covered wire skilfully introduced to give strength to the fabric, the whole treatment subordinate to a display of animal life, arranged in groups or pairs across the carpet. Ten groups represent a dappled stag, pulled to the ground by a lion, and seized at the same time by a tiger. In addition to these groups, ten wild boars are represented in full flight, the drawing strikingly recalling one of the animals represented in the rock-cut sculptures of Tank-e-bostan, near Kermanshah, dating from A.D. 400. There are also ten large animals, perhaps bears, and twenty of smaller size, all drawn with great freedom. Border : deep blue ground, relieved by a regular but conventional treatment of the "cloud" pattern in pink, and a very beautiful interlacing treble trellis of buff, light blue, and green, the latter connected, at intervals of about six inches, by flowers woven in relief, as explained above, on a flat ground of white, with a raised pile in blue and red. A narrow band of cream, relieved by a coloured tracery, separates the border from the centre, and a similar band of red completes the carpet on the outside.

Date : early 16th century. Hand-tied knots to square inch, 650.

Place of origin : Kashan.





PLATE V.

SILK CARPET. XVITH CENTURY.

PLATE V.

SILK CARPET. XVITH CENTURY.

Dimensions : 7 ft. 4 in. x 6 ft. 4 in. Ground of centre : deep red. Design : various trees of the forest, planted in horizontal lines and connected on each line by the serpentine course of a stream, forming shallow pools, with a growth of wild flowers on the banks, the mud flats left by the receding water being carefully indicated in the weaving. Border : a bold conventional floral design on a very beautiful light red ground, edged on either side by bands of pale green relieved by delicate tracery. An interesting and frequently recurring detail in the design is the germinating seed, of which tracings, taken from this and another carpet, are given on Plate VII., figure 5.

Hand-tied knots to the square inch, 676.


Place of origin : probably Shiraz.

Date : 16th century.



Persian Carpets.

*A paper, by Edward Stebbing, read at the Meeting of the Art Workers' Guild,
December, 1891.*

S the scope of the inquiry before the meeting this evening embraces the wide range of carpets generally, while my remarks are to be confined to those of Persia alone, I must restrict myself to a mere reference to one or two points of interest connected with this, in itself, vast and as yet imperfectly described subject.

It has been remarked with astonishment that, though we see the flight of a bird and understand its anatomy, still we fail in the effort to imitate the movement; so, we have the finest specimens of carpets, we understand their structure and see their wondrous beauty, and yet, with all our skill, we fail to produce their equals, possibly because we content ourselves mainly in attempts at copying them instead of striving to originate, after drawing inspiration from their perfection.

It may be said, and with truth, that neither does the East, at the present day, produce the masterpieces of former times. Writing on the subject some fourteen years ago, I remarked that, changeless as the East would appear to be, still the risk was great that even in Persia, the cradle of the Carpet industry, the taste and skill that had attained so high a degree of excellence might become lost in the competition with modern mechanical skill; that this risk was greatly augmented by the fact that the increased demand for Eastern fabrics, caused by the indiscriminate spread of so-called Art tastes, necessitated the employment of native workmen unskilled in the various processes of manufacture. Further, the want of discernment and appreciation often displayed by the foreign buyer added to the error, while the Persian weaver met the demand in the way most satisfactory to his present pecuniary profit, content to satisfy the bare requirements of the market. The remedy was to encourage the weaver to make every effort to recover the clue of lost traditions, and to acquire the skill to work in the old manner. Well, the last few years have seen a great effort and a great revival.

In place of the four or five designs to which the industry was, at the time I refer to, almost entirely confined, there are now some twenty or more of the designs of some of the finest of the old carpets being produced with skill and fidelity. Perfection, no doubt, is not yet attained; still, the weavers work in the traditional way, and often, very often, the spirit of the original design breathes in the modern replica.

Before long we may hope for still better results. The revival has begun, and this is not the first time in the history of Persian carpet weaving that a revival has been necessary. Writing in the early

Origin of Designs.

part of the century, a well-known traveller remarked, "Of the actual condition of the useful and fine arts in Persia, we can neither pronounce that the present inhabitants are in a state of progressive improvement, nor assert that they are less advanced than their forefathers. All that men have gained under a powerful and wise monarch has been lost under his weak and barbarous successors. If a period of peace has invited intelligent strangers to the shores of this kingdom, they have been soon banished by returning war. Knowledge has hitherto ebbed and flowed with the changes in the political situation of that empire, and must continue to do so as long as its inhabitants labour under the depressing influence of a despotic and unsettled government."

At the present day, much must also depend on the growth of a discriminating taste here in England and elsewhere. To adapt a beautiful saddle-bag, some souvenir of Eastern travel, as a covering for a chair is legitimate, but to fill our houses with furniture upholstered in imitation "saddle-bags," and to spread our floors with "prayer rugs" of machine-made velvet pile, is to engender a disgust, from the recoil of which the original works of art can with difficulty escape.

The different designs of the old carpets and the places of their origin* are matters of the greatest interest, though unfortunately surrounded by mystery and difficulty. It seems, however, to the writer that there is strong internal evidence tending to show that the larger number of the designs extant were all evolved from but few originals. By way of illustration, there is the well-known Herati design, commonly called "Persian pattern." Of this Herati design the Persians have a larger and freer treatment, called Rudberani, produced sometimes by partly omitting the repetition of the pattern, or, more frequently, by simply enlarging the scale of the design, the effect in either case being to leave the groundwork more open. Then there is the Herati Drisht, the Grand or Royal Herati, in its boldness and freedom of treatment leaving no room for criticism. All these are the same design, but the untrained eye would often fail to recognise it. Again, the treatment of the leaves and flowers in all the three Herati designs shows an evident affinity to the one commonly known as Afghan. Plate VI. has been prepared to illustrate more clearly the foregoing remarks. The four outline drawings presented have been traced direct from carpets, and reduced in each example to one-fourth scale. Figure 1 is the ordinary Herati or "Persian" design. Figure 2 is the "Rudberani" or "open" Herati. The apparent intricacy of both is caused by contraction, the motive of the pattern in both cases being interwoven into the repeat of the design. Inspection will show that the centre of the tracing contains four leaves identical with the four shown in colours. These four uncoloured leaves belong to the repeats of the design introduced, respectively, from the right and left.

Figure 3 gives the Grand or Royal Herati. Here the treatment is broad and free, leaving no room for any repeat, and the Herati design in its purity occupies the whole breadth of the carpet. It may be interesting to note that the skilful weaver, in the specimen from which the illustration is taken, varied and broadened the effect by giving half-sections of the design alternately with the full pattern as he proceeded with his work.

* The Great Ardebil Carpet, with its signed and dated Inscription, has now (1893) removed most of the mystery and difficulty referred to.—E. S.

FIG. 4.



FIG. 3.

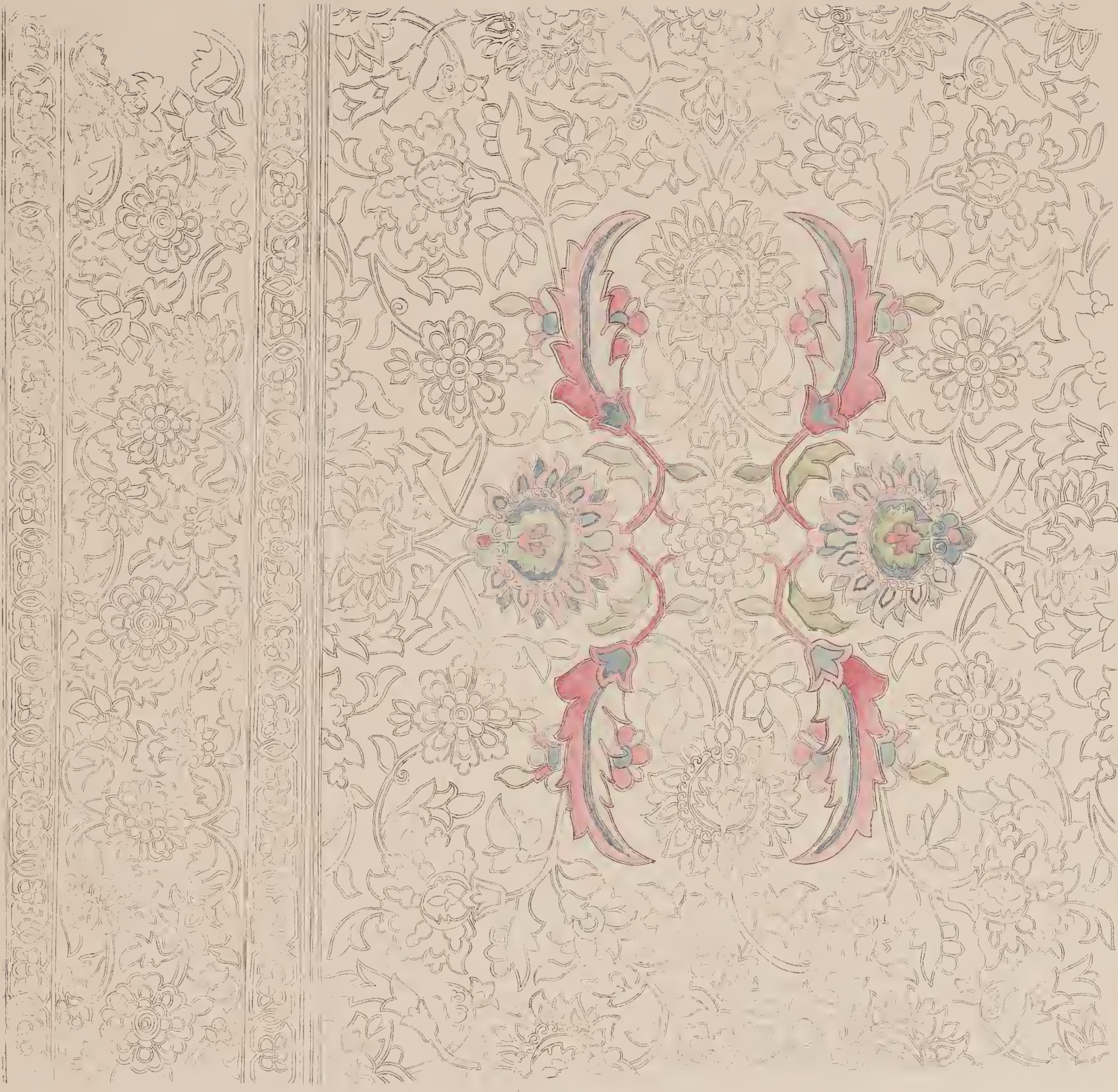


FIG. 2.



FIG. 1.

Mosaic Pavements.

Figure 4 illustrates one form of the so-called Afghan design. Here the scale is still larger and more open, but its affinity to the "Herati" is very evident. In all four instances four flowers are grouped symmetrically round a centre, while from the top and lower flowers, respectively, spring a pair of leaves, and it will be observed that in every instance *each leaf overlies two flowers*. This latter peculiarity is of great interest, as it occurs in a variety of other Oriental designs, and notably in some of the well-known "Polish" rugs.

Another series is exemplified by the so-called pine pattern. This is the cone or sacred flame. The different methods of treating it constitute to all intents and purposes as many different carpets. This design is known to the weavers as Cocos, but many Persians call it Botteh, and state that it is derived from the leather bag with a narrow neck known by that name, and commonly used for money, which they count as it falls, coin by coin, from the mouth. The sacred source of the name is no doubt the true one.

The origin of another design, very frequently met with, speaks for itself, being a flower blossom with its four leaves pegged down to the ground to serve as a pattern to the weaver. (Plate 7, figure 6.) The prolongation of these leaves till they meet those of the next series of the repeat of the design forms a trellis, and this treated as a true trellis in another carpet produces a fresh design, of which the origin would be obscure but for the clue just referred to.

And while on the subject of the trellis, so frequently met with, and especially in the Indian design of Ramachendrarowkhani, it is curious to note that the repetition of the several parts of the pattern in the ordinary Herati and Gul Anar (flower of the pomegranate) designs will, when seen at a short distance, reproduce this trellis exactly, so much so that it is very probably the origin of its special treatment. Similar explanations might be given of many other designs, but the foregoing will suffice to draw attention to the subject as affecting the majority of those most frequently met with.*

Mr. Conway, in his interesting notice of Mr. Sidney Colvin's carpet in the recent number of the *Art Journal*, expresses the opinion that fine carpets were made in imitation of mosaic pavements which Roman prestige had caused to be the fashion in all the ancient civilised world. As bearing on this view I have had a small carpet exhibited, which, although made only some twenty years ago, is itself the replica of an old carpet dating probably from the early part of last century, and formerly in the hands of Vincent Robinson and Company. The design is a woven representation of the well-known Star and Cross tile work, common throughout the East, from very early times, in the decoration of walls. It is one of the most difficult designs to work, and is only undertaken by weavers of the highest skill. An interesting feature in the particular example illustrated is the introduction of clamps or fastenings to secure the tiles in position. As the ordinary method of fixing is simply to embed the tiles in cement, the use of clamps would seem to point to some earlier period of art when materials of a different nature were employed for decorative purposes. (Plate 7, figure 7.)

* Elsewhere, page 10, I have touched on the subject of evolution as exemplified in the borders of carpets, of which some interesting tracings are given on Plate VII., figures 8 to 12.—E. S.

Plate VII.

FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.

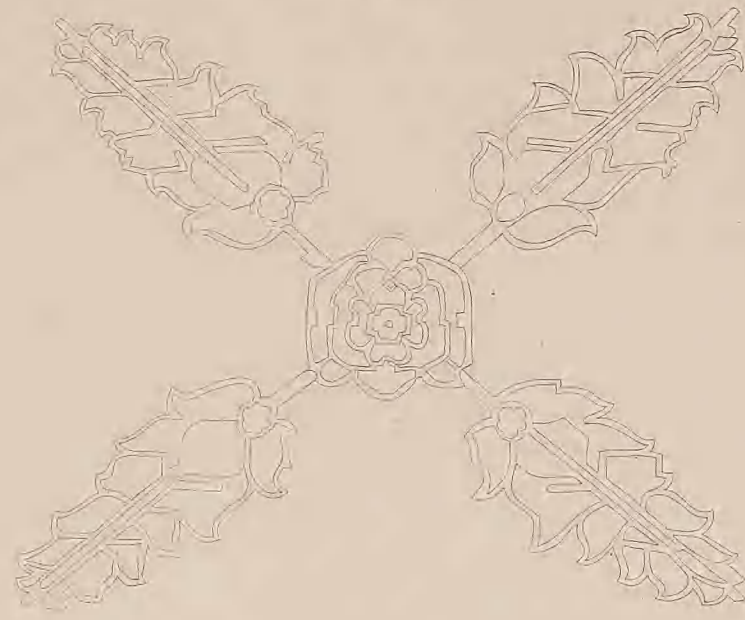


FIG. 7.



FIG. 8.



FIG. 12.



FIG. 11.

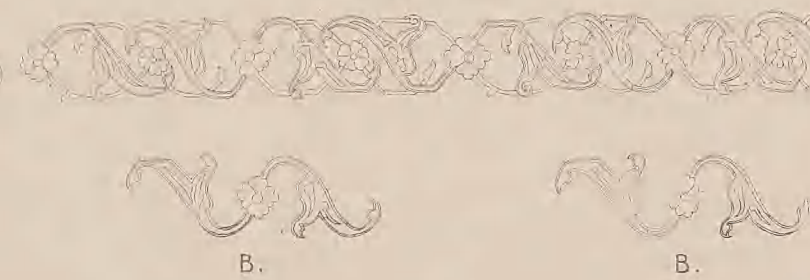


FIG. 9.

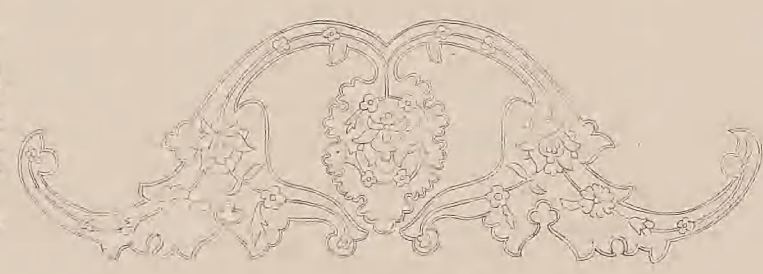


FIG. 10.

Symbolism.

Another rug, of which the central design is the cone or sacred flame, is intended to represent a tomb with its carpet covering adorned with hanging tassels, while pots of flowers are arranged all round in a manner usual in the East. To this Oriental custom may, no doubt, be traced the simple and beautiful practice still common with us of planting flowers round the "grassy barrows of the happier dead."

This, however, brings me to another class of decoration to be found in very many of the finest of the old carpets, the realistic treatment, where, regardless of precepts from the Koran against representing animal life—equally regardless of the canon of taste so well laid down by Mr. William Morris, "that the pattern should lie absolutely flat upon the ground, and that the design should always be very elementary and merely suggestive of forms of leafage, flowers, beasts, and birds"—the weaver did his utmost to depict in his work both the fauna and flora of his country. Of course, one explanation of this is that carpets were regarded in the East in a higher light than among ourselves, and that symbolism was a powerful motive affecting largely the general design.

Of this realistic treatment the carpet, illustrated on Plate IV., is a good instance—it speaks for itself. It is, I believe, as a hand-made carpet, almost unique for fineness of make. There are 650 knots to the square inch, giving a total of about 6½ millions for the whole carpet. It is also a good example of the use of metal, probably to give strength, inwoven in the fabric. I have every reason to believe that it was finished about the year of the Hegira 942, that is, in the early part of the 16th century. The still rarer carpet (Plate V.), from the point of view of its design, is the small one representing with astonishing fidelity various trees of the forest. Of the symbolism referred to above, probably the whole design is a remarkable instance; but the germinating seed, the exponent of life, may be taken as an example. It is introduced freely in the design, both of the centre of the carpet and also in the border. The particular figure has given rise to a considerable amount of conjecture, but, happily, a small carpet in the possession of Vincent Robinson and Company sets the matter at rest. I have had tracings of these germinating seeds or cotyledons in various stages of development given on Plate VII., figure 5. It will be noticed that the full-grown plant is seen sprouting from its seed, the exact form of which is also shown in one of the smaller tracings. These two carpets both came from mosques in Central Persia, the latter, at all events, having been probably made at Shiraz, while there is reason to believe that the former may have been made at Kashan.

The situation of Shiraz was in every way favourable to the carpet industry, and down to quite recent times very fine rugs have been made in its vicinity, more especially the so-called "Mecca" rugs. I have in my possession an old rug, probably also made at Shiraz, which would seem to prove that European influences were not unknown among Persian weavers, even before the days of machinery and steam. The design of the centre is a scroll work of golden yellow, the ends encircled by festoons of flowers on a crimson ground, framing a bouquet of rosebuds and roses on a background of cream colour. Border: a floral design of conventional Persian treatment on a ground of pale yellow, with an inscription in Persian characters at the top end. As an example showing European influences, probably French, it is of considerable interest.

Ars longa.

It may be well to give a word of caution as to the employment of the words "fine" or "finest" so often applied to rare specimens of the hand-made carpets of the East, as very many errors have arisen from the misuse of the expressions referred to. In a recent and well-known case in the Law Courts a witness, of the highest authority in these matters, described the carpet in question as having no less than five million stitches in it, and it has been very properly classed as one of the most remarkable specimens in existence, both for treatment of the design, colour, and general excellence of manufacture; but it is not an exceptional example of "fine," that is "close," make, although often quoted as such, the count being about 256 to the square inch, as compared with from four hundred to nearly seven hundred in other instances. This question of "fineness of count" must depend entirely upon the particular make of carpet referred to. Exceptional fineness in a Kenar or divan carpet of camel hair would be coarseness in a Sennah gift rug or a goat's hair carpet from the Tekke-Turkoman looms. In taking the "count," also, great care is necessary, as it very often happens, from the peculiarity of the tie in certain makes, that one knot is counted as two by the inexperienced.

Astonishment has often been expressed at the fresh and splendid condition of carpets undoubtedly hundreds of years old. The explanation is that, as is well known, they were either made for mosques and guarded with jealous care, or, if private property, were regarded as heirlooms. Palace inventories refer to them as "Treasury goods," and bearing on the subject is an interesting story told by Aga Mahomed Khan, the Shah, in an autobiographical sketch, referring to the time when, as a boy, he was a State prisoner at the Court of Kurreen Khan at Shiraz:—

"I had no power of declaring openly that spirit of revenge which I always harboured against the murderers of my father, but while I sat with Kurreen Khan in his hall of public assembly, I often employed myself in cutting his fine carpets with a knife which I concealed under my cloak, and my mind felt some relief in doing him in this secret manner all the injury I could." At the time Aga Mahomed Khan mentioned this, the carpets he had tried to destroy had become his own, and he used to add, "I am now sorry for what I did; it was foolish and showed a want of foresight."

The whole subject before us is fraught with interest, and we may almost agree with M. Charles Blanc, who once expressed his belief that "were a man to live as long as Methuselah he would never cease to find fresh beauties in a Persian carpet." For my own part, I am inclined to apply a celebrated French artist's remark about statues, "*Les statues sont comme les hommes; pour les bien connaître il faut vivre parmi eux.*" To understand the carpets of the East, you must indeed live with them, and live with them long.

PRESS NOTICES

ON

THE HOLY CARPET OF THE MOSQUE AT ARDEBIL.

From "THE TIMES," May 26th, 1892.

AN EXTRAORDINARY CARPET.—At the galleries of Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Co., of Wigmore Street, there will be on view in the afternoons of the next few days what may probably without any exaggeration be called the finest Persian carpet in the world. This is the Holy Carpet of the Mosque of Ardebil, in Persia; a carpet which for size, beauty, condition, and authenticated age is entirely unrivalled by any known example. To quote the description given by Mr. Edward Stebbing, the managing director of the firm, and a well-known authority on these matters, "The dimensions of the carpet are 34ft. 6in. by 17ft. 6in. The ground of the body of the fabric is of a rich blue, covered with a floral tracery of exquisite delicacy and freedom of treatment. A centre medallion of pale yellow terminates on its outer edge in sixteen minaret-shaped points, from which spring sixteen cartouches, four green, four red, and eight cream; and from two of these again are, as it were, suspended and hanging in the direction of the respective ends of the carpet, two of the sacred lamps of the mosque." But the most extraordinary detail of all is the pale cream cartouche placed within the border at the top end of the carpet, bearing its invoven inscription, which is thus translated:—"I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold. My head has no protection other than this porchway. The work of the slave of this Holy Place, Maksoud of Kashan, in the year 942." Now 942 of the Hegira is 1535 of our era; so that the carpet was actually in existence, in the Mosque of the sacred city of the Suffavean Dynasty, at the time when Queen Elizabeth sent Anthony Jenkinson on an embassy to Shah Tamasp. It need not be said that carpets thus signed and dated are extremely rare, and are historically important as forming the *points de repère* for the students of Oriental art. But a carpet not only dated and signed, but of such size and beauty as this, is literally a thing unheard of. In an adjoining room the firm have hung four specimens of very ancient Persian art, of much smaller dimensions, but still of great beauty and rarity, particularly one, about 7ft. by 6ft., with a deep red ground on which various forest trees are woven, with a stream running through them.

From "THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN," May 23rd, 1892.

Lovers of beautiful things should on no account miss a unique opportunity which is about to offer itself. To-morrow and for about a fortnight there will be on view at Messrs. Vincent Robinson's establishment a collection of Persian carpets which should start every true believer in beauty on an instant pilgrimage to Wigmore Street. By the kindness of Mr. E. Stebbing I yesterday enjoyed a private view of the collection, and having seen and studied a great number of textiles all over the world, I can safely say that the collection here exhibited is absolutely unique in character. Among the various fine woven fabrics is the famous silk carpet of the sixteenth century with the quaintly archaic design of trees on the banks of a stream, and which has the incredible muster of 676 hand-tied knots to the square inch. Others illustrate the development of well-known patterns. Yet another shows the successful attempt that is now being made to revive the native industry in Persia. But the crowning glory is a magnificent carpet from the Mosque at Ardebil, now exhibited for the first time in Europe, and which entirely beggars description. One can only say that it is beyond doubt the finest carpet known to modern times. Not only in design and colouring, but even

in its colossal size (34ft. 6in. by 17ft. 6in.), it is a veritable *chef d'œuvre*. Moreover, it is the unique example of a signed and dated specimen. The inscription tells us that it was made for the mosque, "the work of the slave of this holy place, Maksoud of Kashan, in the year 942" (of the Hegira, *i.e.*, A.D. 1535). Mr. Stebbing, in a charming little monograph issued to visitors, explains the importance of this inscription. It shows that the Ardebil carpet was intended as a supreme effort for the most holy place of Persia at the very time when the art of carpet-weaving in that country was at its zenith; and certainly the artist was justified in the result. Its beauty should be seen to be believed.

From "THE ACADEMY," June, 1892.

There is just now to be seen, in the gallery of Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Co., in Wigmore Street, a collection of Persian carpets and rugs, which, apart from their intrinsic beauty, supply a history of the art of carpet-weaving in Persia from the sixteenth century downwards. The chief attraction is a carpet of unusual dimensions, and in perfect preservation, which shows by an inscription that it was made for the mosque at Ardebil in 1535 A.D. By way of introduction to the catalogue, a paper has been printed, which Mr. E. Stebbing read before the Art Workers' Guild last December.

From "THE QUEEN," June, 1892.

This marvellous piece of handiwork of the year 942 of the Hegira—1535 of our era—is well worth taking a long journey to see; so, when it is laid down almost at our doors, so to speak, it is no wonder that the visitors to view it have been legion. Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Co., of Wigmore Street, have generously afforded Londoners an opportunity of examining what may well be considered the finest example extant of old Persian carpets. Mr. Edward Stebbing has written a most interesting description of it; and we can only wish that the illustration in colours, which is promised, could have been inserted as a frontispiece. The ground colour is a rich blue subdued with a light floral tracery of quiet tints; this is surrounded with a band of crimson, next comes a band of cream, on which is a charming pattern—a variation of the "cloud"; then a broader border of cartouches, red, green, and yellow, filled with floral designs on a brown ground; and, to complete the whole, a band of tawny brown with scroll in light blue. The centre decoration comprises a medallion of pale yellow terminating in sixteen minaret-shaped points, from which spring sixteen cartouches and two representations of the sacred lamp of the Mosque. In a cream cartouche at one end of the carpet is an interwoven inscription which, when translated, reads:—"I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold. My head has no protection other than this porchway. The work of the slave of this Holy place, Maksoud of Kashan, in the year 942." As a harmony of colouring it is simply perfect, the tone is exquisite, years have but enhanced its beauty. The dimensions of the carpet are 34ft. 6in. by 17ft. 6in. If space permitted, we should have liked to describe some other specimens of antique Persian carpets in Messrs. Vincent Robinson and Co.'s collection: more especially a small one of silk, 16th century, with centre of deep red, and for design, forest trees connected by a stream with wild flowers on banks. The border is of a lovely shade of light red with floral designs. There are bands of pale green introduced. It has 676 hand-tied knots to the square inch.

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